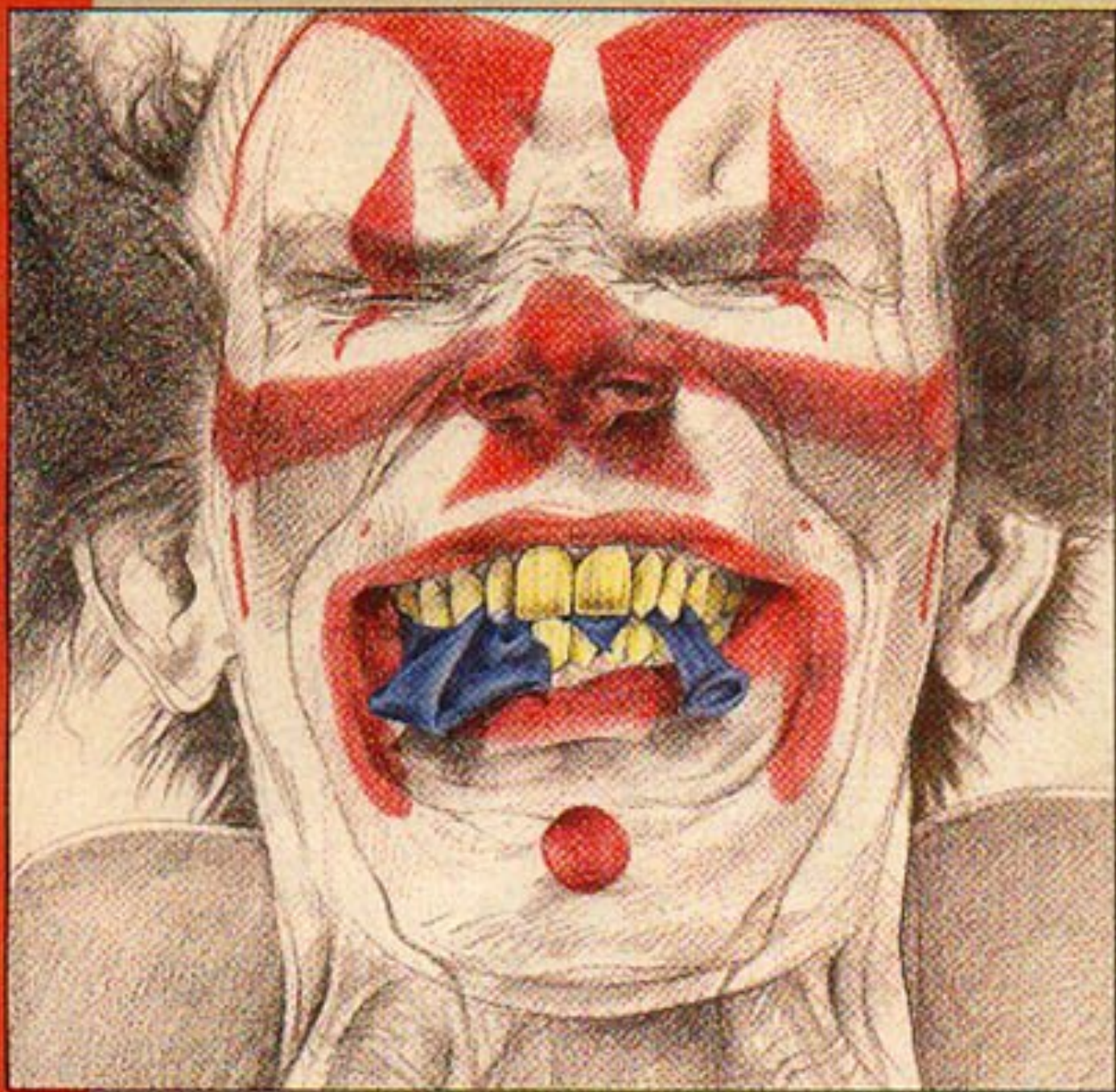


PIRANHIA PRESS

BEAUTIFUL  
STORIES  
FOR UGLY CHILDREN



VOLUME 1



FOR MATURE READERS

Dave  
LOUAPRE  
&  
Dan  
SWEETMAN



# A Cotton Candy Autopsy

By  
David Louapre

Drawings  
By  
Dan Sweetman



A Piranha Press Publication

The circus was burning.





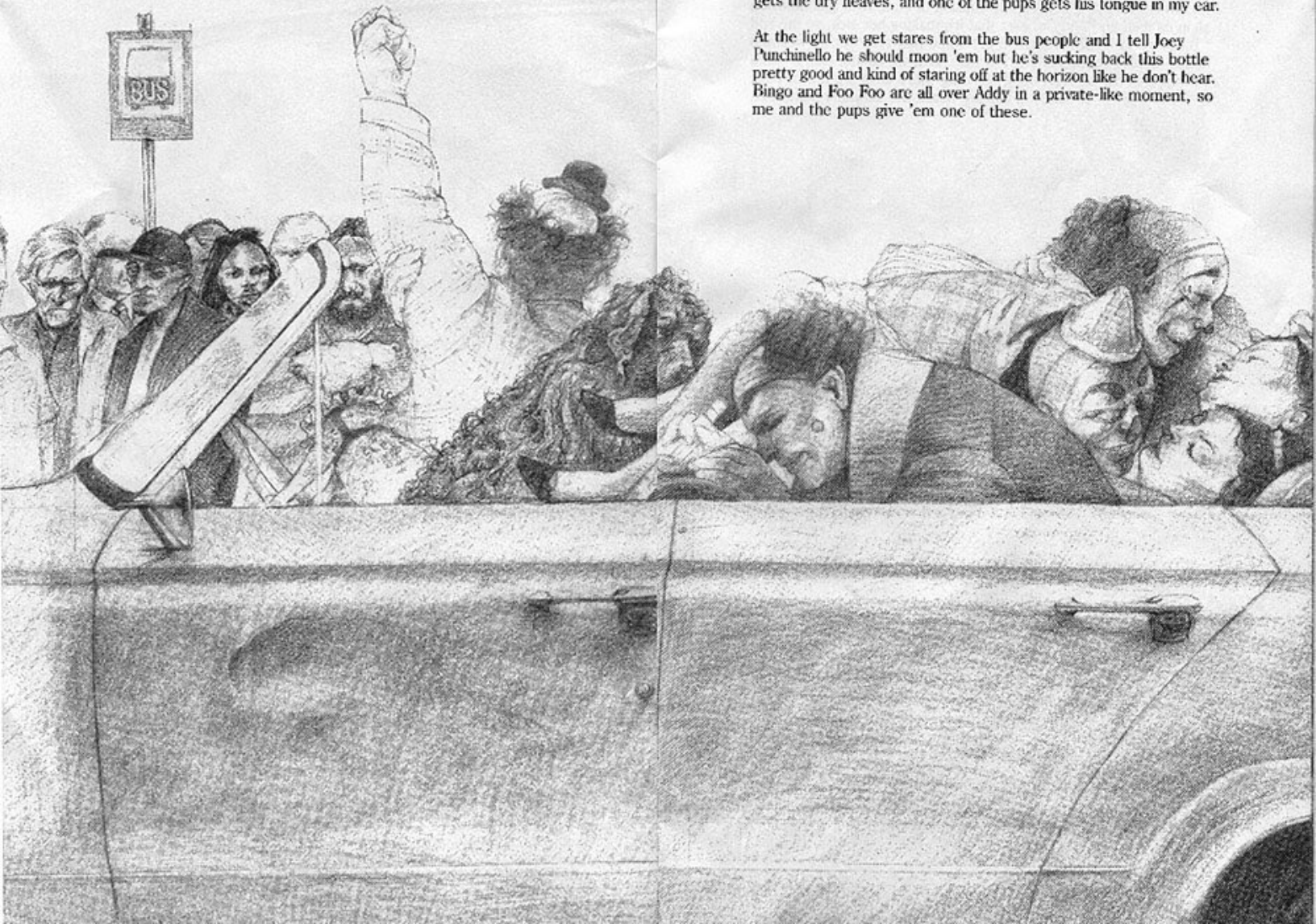
It was me, Bingo, Foo Foo, and Joey Punchinello from the street. Foo Foo stole the keys to the Dart while Bingo grabbed Addy the Freaklady and some of our best pups. I got the booze out the ringmaster's trailer when he was watching the big-top burn. Joey Punchinello just lay low. Everyone knew he was always wiser to things than he was saying, like when that midget got drowned in the horse trough last winter.

We figured we'd go 'til either the gas or money ran out, and if we could, swing back for Bingo's gig in the suburbs next day. Whatever. Not a damned thing about the fire on 'the radio so we blasted the tunes and shot west doin' 95, teasing the dogs and taking turns with Addy. In the back seat she was anybody's freak.

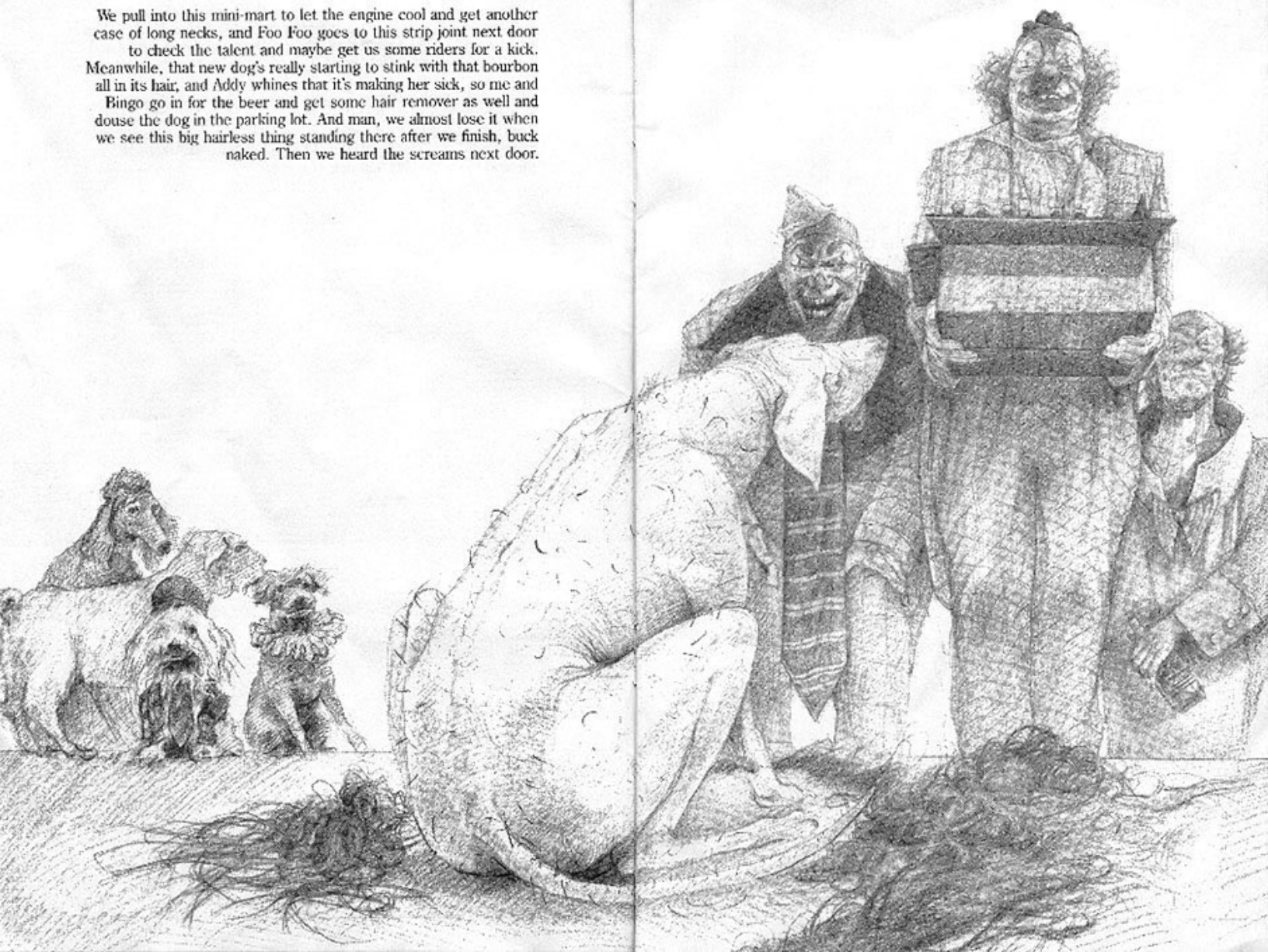


Just outside Scalderville Foo Foo spies this big hairy thing we just gotta have, so we throw it in the back and Addy dumps her bourbon on it and we all get a pretty good laugh. Bingo swallows wrong and gets the dry heaves, and one of the pups gets his tongue in my ear.

At the light we get stares from the bus people and I tell Joey Punchinello he should moon 'em but he's sucking back this bottle pretty good and kind of staring off at the horizon like he don't hear. Bingo and Foo Foo are all over Addy in a private-like moment, so me and the pups give 'em one of these.



We pull into this mini-mart to let the engine cool and get another case of long necks, and Foo Foo goes to this strip joint next door to check the talent and maybe get us some riders for a kick. Meanwhile, that new dog's really starting to stink with that bourbon all in its hair, and Addy whines that it's making her sick, so me and Bingo go in for the beer and get some hair remover as well and douse the dog in the parking lot. And man, we almost lose it when we see this big hairless thing standing there after we finish, buck naked. Then we heard the screams next door.



Seems Foo Foo met up with some bikers at Rico's, and I'm telling you, if the clown has a natural enemy, it's bikers! So this body comes flying out the door and I say, "Hey, that looks like the Foo," which it was, and then there's all these guys kicking him and running toward us with knives. So I fire up the Dart and gun for the thick part of the crowd. I don't know if I got any of 'em, but we slide to a stop right next to Foo Foo and drag him in real quick and split. Whole time Joey's letting out these shrieks of laughter like I never heard, and Addy's crying. I figured it was on account of Joey Punchinello freaking out, you know, 'cause I couldn't see nothin' through the dogs. Then I see Foo Foo.





Needless to say, those bikers did quite a number on the Foo, crushing his face pretty good and what not, but we figured most of the bleeding was goin' on inside, on account of he kept splitting up blood even after his lips stopped bleeding. It was a bad scene all around, and Joey starts swearing non-stop, laughing real weird and not even looking at Foo Foo, which really sets Addy off and she kind of hugs herself because nobody else will at this point. She used to be wild for those bare-knuckle clown fights behind the tents after hours, but this was different to her, I guess.





I get us out of town pretty quick, and by this time it's late. So we spend the night behind this fill-up station with some real low types who hassle us about the dogs, who were howling real strange like I never heard 'em do before. The rest of the night we sometimes catch each other's eye, and nobody says anything but we all know the dogs are wise to something, and no one wants to take a guess. Then we wake up next morning and there's Foo Foo, slumped against the dumpster, dead in the early sunlight. And there's Joey next to him just laughing like he don't know what's goin' on. Just laughing.

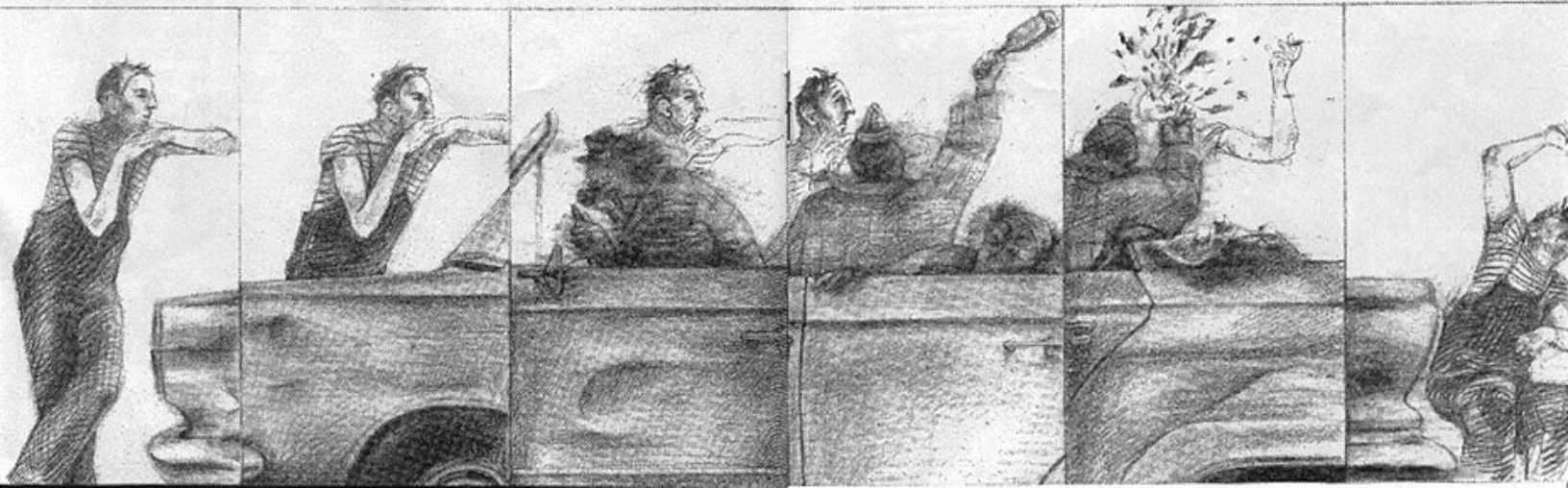
Next thing I know, Bingo's up on the dumpster doin' this little dance like we hit the jackpot, walking on the edge with his yellow umbrella like business as usual. Me and Addy don't say nothin', and Joey stops laughing and pulls his knees up tight to his chest and grins real big at the dogs, who sort of walk around looking at us like, "Yeah, now what?" Bingo was closest to the Foo. Been with him since Coney and the bust in '66.



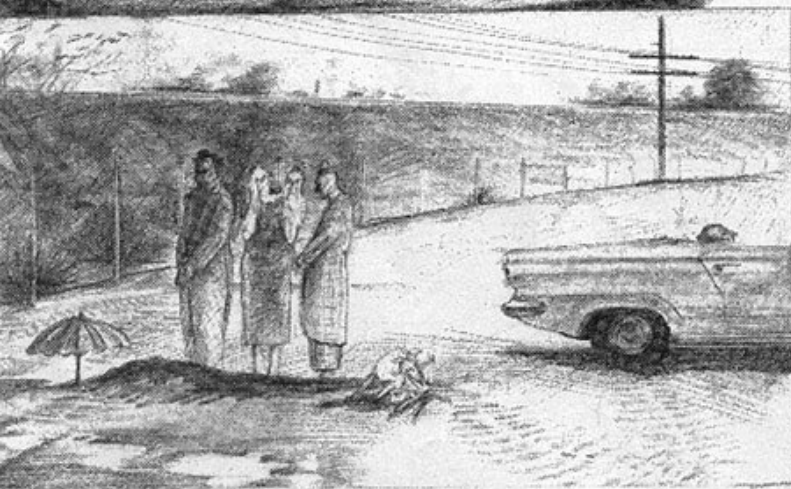


I figured it'd be best all around if we got a bottle in Joey and headed back the way we came for Bingo's gig. The pups ain't eaten since we started so we stop and get 'em some fries on the way. That's when we saw that stinking munc, mugging like he's in some box that ain't there and leaning against some phony wind. It hit us all at the same time that he should die! It was everything about Foo Foo, I guess,

and when I gun it out of that drive-thru, the crowd around this idiot scatters like a dream and BAM! — Bingo smashes a bottle of scotch in his face and sends him flying, and we tear off down the highway listening for sirens that never come. No one says a word for about twenty minutes except Joey, who's singing "Do you know the Muffin Man?" to himself, but he's not really singing as much as growling.

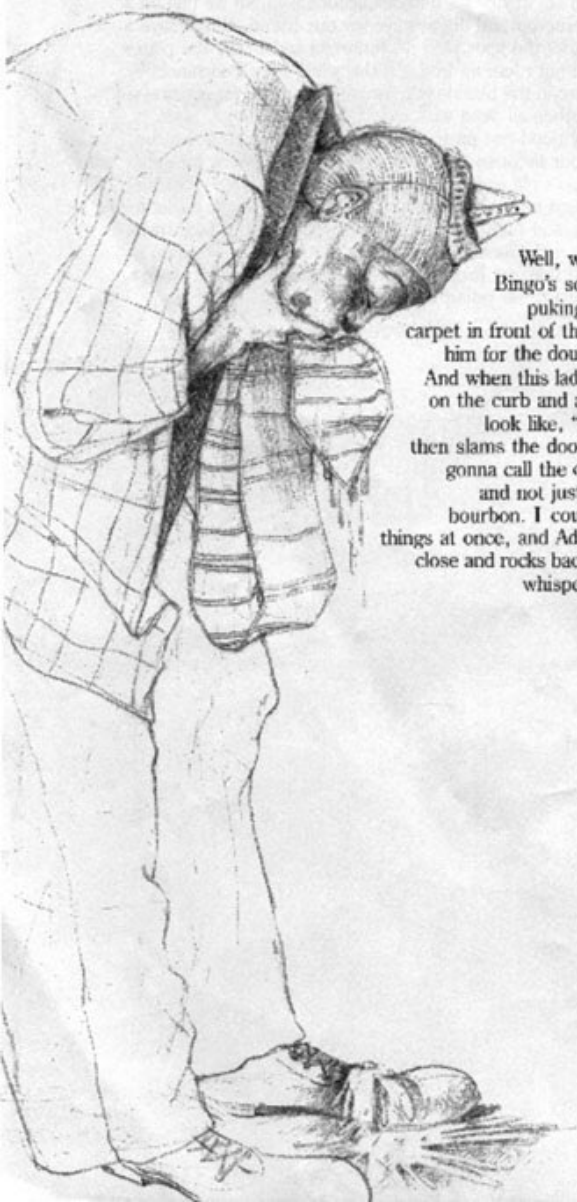






Finally Addy says we should probably bury Foo Foo somewhere out of respect, and anyway he's a bit conspicuous, too, so we pull off at this ancient reservoir and dig a grave for our friend. Bingo says a rhyme and marks the spot with his umbrella and I take the plates off the car and bury 'em as well. All the while Joey Punchinello's just sitting there in the blazing hot car with his make-up starting to run and his clothes all dead with sweat. Bingo and Addy start drinking pretty good and petting real heavy, and we're down the road half an hour before we know three of the dogs are missing. We get to Bingo's gig and he's lit like the Fourth of July. It's some kid's birthday and he stands to make about twenty-eight bucks for two hours. Me and Addy wait on the curb outside and take turns checking on Joey. I was starting to think it wasn't just Foo Foo getting trashed that set Joey off. I was starting to think it wasn't such a good idea to be riding with him either.





Well, wouldn't you know it,  
Bingo's so stewed he ends up  
puking on the living room  
carpet in front of the kids and they stiff  
him for the dough and toss him out.  
And when this lady sees me and Addy  
on the curb and all, she gives us this  
look like, "Go to hell, freaks!",  
then slams the door. No doubt she was  
gonna call the cops. Bingo's crying,  
and not just baby tears through  
bourbon. I could see it was lots of  
things at once, and Addy sort of holds him  
close and rocks back and forth real slow,  
whispering in both his ears.





That's when something in me snapped and I was kicking that front door in before I knew what I was doing. Screaming kids, running, crying . . . And that woman standing there with her big fat mouth open on the phone like she seen the devil himself. I grab a couple bottles off the counter without so much as a thank you and they all know not to come near me. It was the first time I ever saw someone scared of me, and I got off. I stared 'em down and strolled out real slow. Never burn a clown.





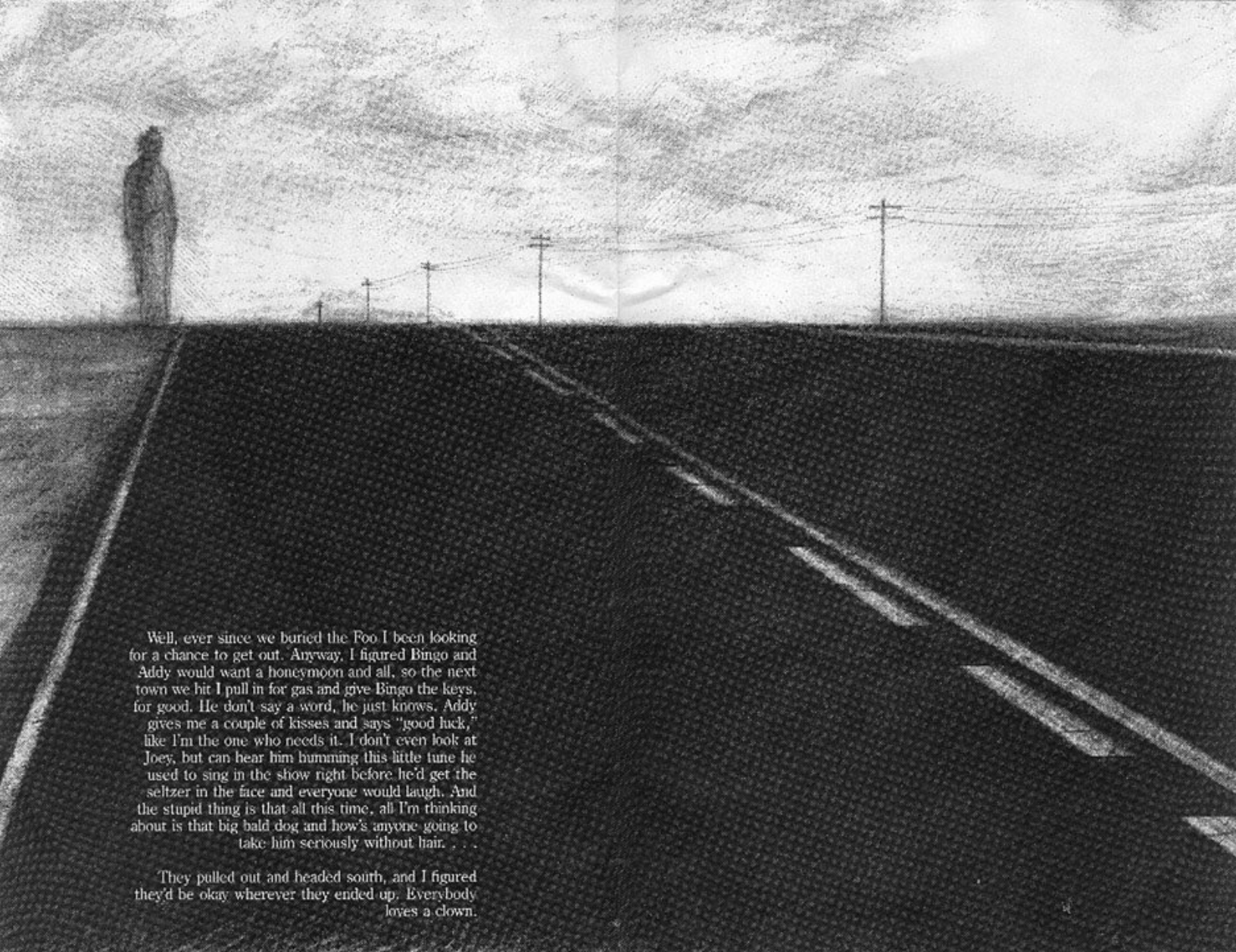
We hit the road and I don't know which way we're heading, just that we're moving fast. Joey Punchinello's starting to smell funny and the naked dog won't go near him. But he's still giggling just the same, and when I catch his glance in the rear view for a second, I chuckle myself. Bingo and Addy just lay there, not saying nothin', staring at the flat ugly landscape racing by. They had something, I knew, and I felt warm and happy and sick all at once. And Joey's sitting next to 'em there, rubbing his legs and snickering like someone told him something dirty.

We pull into this abandoned Texaco and everyone gets out but Joey. That's when Addy tells me she and Bingo want to get married, which doesn't surprise me. She always liked Bingo best from either side, it seemed, and I couldn't figure how they'd be any worse off than any other married couple. Bingo asks me if I'll do the ceremony and I say yeah. We have a secret rite that sticks as good as any legal one and saves the usual hassle with outsiders. And as far as I know, no one ever breaks our vow.

So I marry them in front of a busted Coke machine and it's pretty beautiful. Bingo says "Love makes the world go 'round'" and I leave and find some rope on the ground to tie Joey Punchinello's hands with. He don't even know me at this point—sitting there clapping his fists together, making these awful noises that made me wish I had more rope.







Well, ever since we buried the Foo I been looking for a chance to get out. Anyway, I figured Bingo and Addy would want a honeymoon and all, so the next town we hit I pull in for gas and give Bingo the keys, for good. He don't say a word, he just knows. Addy gives me a couple of kisses and says "good luck," like I'm the one who needs it. I don't even look at Joey, but can hear him humming this little tune he used to sing in the show right before he'd get the seltzer in the face and everyone would laugh. And the stupid thing is that all this time, all I'm thinking about is that big bald dog and how's anyone going to take him seriously without hair. . . .

They pulled out and headed south, and I figured they'd be okay wherever they ended up. Everybody loves a clown.

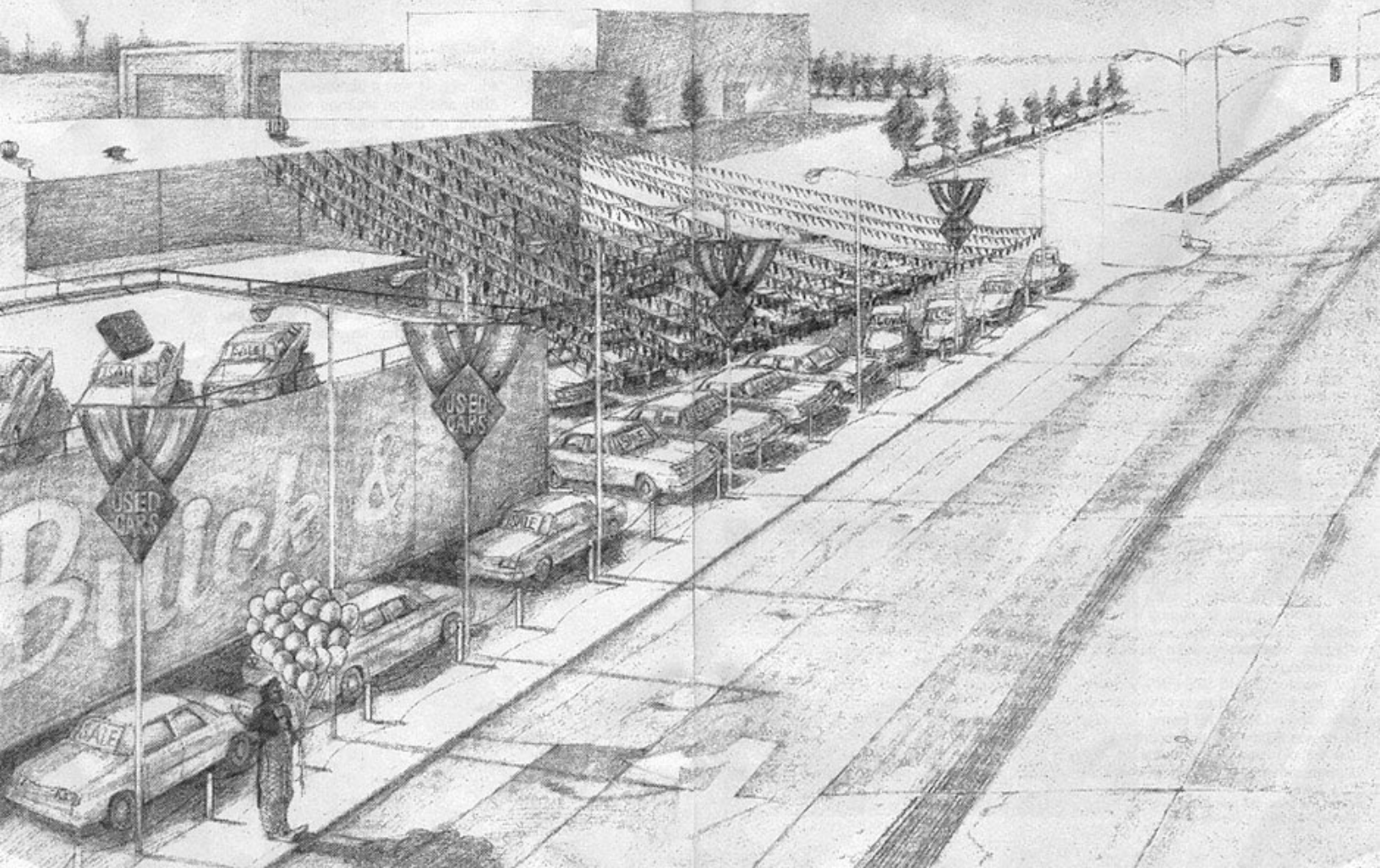


That was the last I saw of 'em. Years later I found a postcard they'd sent to an old address. It was a photograph, actually, of Addy and Bingo wearing sombreros and sitting on this donkey painted like a zebra in Mexico. Said they were "happy as clams," working a new act in a sideshow with the naked dog, who was a big hit, they say. They also told how, on the way down, Joey Punchinello chewed through his ropes and jumped out the car on the highway. The last they saw him he was running straight into the desert screaming. They looked for him but never found a trace, so they moved on. I should stop by if I get down that way, they said. They'd be easy enough to find.

Like I say, that was years ago, and there's no way I'm going to Mexico. I got this steady gig at a used car lot handing out balloons to kids and waving customers in off the sidewalk. The boss man treats me fine because he knows a good clown is hard to find, and I think that deep down I make him nervous. Real nervous, which makes me laugh. I laugh all the time now and sometimes think of Joey and maybe someday going to look for him. But I figure it probably wouldn't do no good, bringing him back. He was never really happy like the rest of us.



Snakes probably got him by now anyhow.





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